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## jonathan joseph and olaf corry review each other's books on governmentality and global politics and then respond to each other's reviews

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### **Constructing a Global Polity: Theory, Discourse and Governance**

Olaf Corry (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 256 pp., ISBN: 978-0230238756

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In this original and stimulating book, Olaf Corry sets out to find an alternative way of looking at the global. His concern is that existing models lock us into debates about the nature of an *international* system and limit us to seeing things either as hierarchy or anarchy. The challenge is to provide a model of structure that takes us beyond these two alternatives, hence the idea of a global polity.

The book looks at different ways of conceiving of global polity. Rejecting the orthodox international model that lurks behind most recent accounts, Corry aims

to show how a particular global polity discourse is constituted through discursive practices rather than in addition to something else like anarchy or hierarchy. This is not to deny the importance of states, but to shift the focus from state/non-state to global/non-global. It is defined by orientation to a governance object that is predicated on framing the world as one place. It depends on a shared understanding that something can or should be governed.

This leads to a discussion of what a governmentality approach might offer. It means rejecting the common use of

governmentality by International Relations (IR) scholars which results in a reworking of sovereign authority or the scaling up of a liberal regime of power knowledge. Rather than forcing a historical account of liberal governmentality onto global politics, this emergence should be seen as something constitutive in its own right. A focus on polity as a model of political structure means examining the emergence of global governable objects.

Corry opposes the idea that governmentality expresses some underlying ontology arguing that Marxist readings of Foucault, such as mine, reduce governmentality to the implementation of liberal capitalist development, denying that practices, mentalities and discourses are constitutive in themselves. He suggests that, while Foucault shows how governmentality provides the conditions of possibility for the emergence of modern liberal societies, here it is the other way around with social structures held to provide the conditions of possibility for governmental rule.

Corry argues that the wrong response to the critics is to simply claim that global governmentality is more successful than the doubters perceive. We have an over-estimation of global governmentality in the first case, underestimation in the second. Both approaches mistakenly start from what actual institutions are doing and then measure their success or failure, whereas a better way to understand global governmentality is by examining how governance is problematised and how domains of governance are established. Instead of arguing over the degree to which the world has been governmentalised, we should examine those mentalities of governance that presuppose the world as one place.

I would certainly accept Corry's argument that we should look at the way that governance problematises global subjects and objects, and in advancing the notion of global polity, this book makes a major

contribution. I disagree that this is an either/or issue. Otherwise approaches such as mine are bound to fail because they do not conform to a pure model. Hence, I do not agree with the claim that polity is constituted not by a hierarchy among subjects but their orientation towards a common object because how this orientation is decided or indeed constituted in the first place is a hierarchical issue. Indeed, this is half accepted when Corry says: 'Just as there are many hierarchies, some more important than others, governance-objects are multiple but only a limited number define the political landscape' (p. 90). That only a limited number can succeed is due to the hierarchical nature of the existing system, something realists and Marxists explain in terms of hegemony. While I agree that polity is usefully understood as 'orientation towards a common object', I believe that the nature of both the orientation and the common object is decided by hierarchy defined as 'subordination between subjects' (p. 99).

While I am almost prepared to accept the suggestion that my position brings me close to the mainstream neoliberal IR research agenda and its focus on the effects of international institutions and regimes, I would not want to see my understanding of the regulation of states limited to such models, as must be the case if I follow Corry's advice and separate hierarchical models from polity ones. Corry suggests that a study of European polity should focus on how actors orientate themselves around the governance of Europe through the notion of a shared (if contested) discourse. However, this surely begs the question of the type of actors involved, and therefore makes the question of whether the state is still in control just as important as the question of which new entities are emerging.

In conclusion, this book's focus on global polity is extremely important. It

means that I will end up doing exactly what Corry probably does not want: reading it in my own way and making use of the important insights insofar as they supplement my own focus on states, regimes, power politics and hegemony.

## RESPONSE TO JOSEPH

The main aim of *Constructing a Global Polity* is to provide another point of departure for analysing global politics to supplement hierarchy and anarchy. Structure in IR depends not only on the arrangement of actors but also on changing *objects* of governance. A 'global polity' is thus not equivalent to global hierarchy and the disappearance of sovereign states. Rather it depends on objects rendered governable that reference the world as one place. The global climate has, for example, recently emerged as an object of knowledge, a target of manipulation and of political struggle. Such objects, I argue, can have structuring effects on world politics, effects that are not picked up on if we only ask 'who governs?'

In his perceptive review of my book, Jonathan Joseph raises some excellent points. First, while he intends to use elements of my global polity theory to supplement his own focus on states and hegemony he cautions that 'the nature of both the orientation and the common object [of a polity] is decided by hierarchy defined as "subordination between subjects"'. A polity model therefore cannot stand alone without analysing power differences.

This is undoubtedly true, and Joseph's timely book makes a strong case for reinserting hegemony into discourses of global governance. However, my model does not deny the importance of unequal power relations. Polities are not *defined* by hierarchy although there will inevitably be power differences within them. This goes for 'anarchies' and 'societies' too: we

identify them by other features than their hierarchical structures. Hence, it does not necessarily follow that polities are 'decided by hierarchy'. The emergence of the global climate as a governance-object, for instance, cannot be understood by focussing on 'subordination between subjects' alone. Consider the relatively subordinate actors such as scientists and environmentalists, or the circulation of iconic globalist images of earth from space, the gradual growth of globalist infrastructure including a global network of metrological monitoring stations, and myriad other processes often undertaken for reasons totally unrelated to climate or global hegemony. Together they have led to the emergence of a global object of governance and thus contributed to the conditions of possibility for a global polity. Just like the Copernican revolution, a global polity is an emergent phenomenon – the result of a messy process rather than the deliberate product of a hegemon. Power is an integral part of the social, but the analytical model of hierarchy should not be our only starting point or picture of political structure.

Second, Joseph cautions that 'the question of whether the state is still in control' is 'just as important as the question of which new entities are emerging'. Again, he is right: the dominant type of actor is of major significance to the politics of any polity. However, whether new objects of governance are emerging is central to their constitution and this dimension is currently excluded from models of political structure. My claim was explicitly *not* that states do not matter (pp. vii, viii, 1, 9 and 11), but rather that it matters to the structure of world politics what actors are trying to be in control of (and, if we begin from there, the world looks somewhat different). This is no longer just their own domestic spheres or other states but also non-geographical objects that reference the world as one place. Globality is social indeed.

In sum, Joseph and I agree that the international is not a self-constituting immutable reality, but a product of social processes and that global governmentality is not a world-spanning liberal regime. My polity model provides a new analytical starting rather than end point, but the relevant actors and their power relations must be analysed to make sense of a

given polity. Most importantly, the entities analysed should not be limited to the ones visible to the usual structural models that ignore what is being governed. Contrary to what he suspects, I am therefore more than happy for Joseph to be analysing the formation of polities, even if we partially differ on how to study hegemony within them.

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### **The Social in the Global: Social Theory, Governmentality and Global Politics**

Jonathan Joseph (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 320 pp.,

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One source of inspiration for current IR theory is Foucault's notion of 'governmentality', usually used to critique realist and liberal understandings of power beyond the domestic setting. In *The Social in the Global*, Jonathan Joseph advances a historical materialist approach that, while avowedly not Foucauldian, makes use of governmentality pitched as a complementary tool for understanding how international hegemonic projects are made to work. Joseph sets out to provide 'a detailed account of how neoliberalism works through the governance aspect and its micro-level operations' (p. 41), but also wants to 'put governmentality in its place' (p. 23) in relation to 'deeper' levels of social reality.

Governmentality refers to 'how governing is more deep-rooted in ways of seeing, thinking and acting' (p. 11), but Joseph deliberately limits it to 'specifically liberal forms of governance that operate through the promotion of freedom, governing from a distance and limitation of government' (p. 16). It is also treated as an 'emergent phenomenon ... it is not the underlying rationality that underpins all other aspects

of the social' (p. 262). These 'other aspects' are primarily 'underlying capitalist social relations' (p. 263), but also the state system and the hegemonic projects within it. Compared with hegemony, 'governmentality is better at showing the specific techniques and technologies of power', not least at the micro-level, but hegemony has 'the better connection to the social context' (p. 41).

With this stall set out, Joseph presents a critique of social theories such as risk society, global governance, civil society and the globalisation literature. He casts them not as innocent theories, but as governmentalitys used in shaping and legitimating practices of global governance in line with neoliberal interests, obfuscating 'the true nature of the capitalist world system' (p. 240). The second part of the book analyses how the World Bank and the EU inflict neoliberal rule on poor countries and Western populations using liberal ideas of 'responsibility, reflection, ownership and partnership' (p. 211).

The analyses of World Bank and EU discourse provide a useful overview of

neoliberal governance and highlight the institutional co-option of some otherwise popular social theories. The idea that governmentality will necessarily function differently in different contexts is also important. Uneven and combined development is an effective antidote to any glib 'the world is flat' notions of globality, including the idea that 'global governmentality' is a uniform and free-floating worldwide liberal regime of power. However, neoliberal governmentality in international organisations has to a certain extent been documented before, social theory is only one source of it, and positing governmentality as a junior partner to Marxism somewhat limits its usefulness.

First, the way governmentality is considered emergent rather than constitutive clears space for the author's preferred underlying ontology of class, capitalist production and the state system, but it does not facilitate analysis of how these may themselves in part be constituted by governmentalities. Despite capitalism also consisting of ideational factors such as property rights, governmentality is considered distinct from 'the wider, deeper picture' (p. 30) and is put 'in its place' (p. 23). Pre-empting such critique, Joseph suggests governmentality maintains its 'own dynamics' pointing to a revival of the state in the post-Washington Consensus as evidence. But even this came about by 'structural conditions of capital accumulation, global markets, security issues and global unevenness' (p. 65). The debate is framed as governmentalities versus the social, rather than asking how, for instance, production processes and the state system are partly made up of governmentalities.

Second, why is governmentality necessarily liberal, governing only through freedom? This leads Joseph to overlook competing and alternative governmentalities (despite his explicit aim to promote resistance). Governmentality more usefully refers to a general analytic focusing

on *any* rationality that conducts conduct through ways of seeing, thinking and acting. Otherwise, 'global governmentality' is clearly a misnomer: there is no totalising worldwide liberal regime. Equally, liberalism is not the only game in town in the West and 'ways of seeing, thinking and acting' are important in non-liberal societies too.

Drawing attention to the 'context' of governmentalities is thus important and Joseph draws on a powerful social theory to do so. However, combining theories is notoriously challenging, and by handing the key to governmentality decisively to its context understood through another theory, the possibility of analysing important changes and resistances through the former becomes limited. The state system and capitalism are taken as given, whereas the global is deemed 'an illusion' (p. 21) – albeit a very powerful one obfuscating the uneven reality of the international. More interesting is how the global is being constituted as a social reality, and, through this configuring, how world politics and liberalism themselves are being reconstituted.

At times, Joseph's use of governmentality is broadly compatible with the concept of ideology understood as a structure of meaning that reinforces, but relies on, underlying social configurations of power. This is not without value but raises the question of what is ultimately gained by referencing Foucault whose project was precisely to explore the constitutive role of discourses, their role in resistance and in relation to multiple rationalities.

## RESPONSE TO CORRY

I wish to respond by outlining two key issues relating to how I see governmentality. The first is governmentality's place in a wider social ontology, the other relates to its liberal character. This is not an attempt to provide the most 'truthful'

reading of Foucault, but an outline of what I consider to be the most useful application to international politics.

On the first issue, Corry correctly notes that I treat governmentality as an emergent phenomenon rather than a deep underlying rationality. I argue that it is underpinned by a particular set of social conditions connected to the development of the capitalist economy and to various configurations of hegemony within it. With such an argument, I am always likely to antagonise my audience. For Foucauldians this is likely to be seen as falsely positing an underlying capitalist reality while seeing governmentality as something that is instrumentally put to use by various social groups. When talking to Gramscians, I would wish to emphasise the opposite – that governmentality is not something that can be simply taken up and used. It pre-exists the social groups who engage with it and helps condition and shape the types of hegemonic strategies that can emerge. As Corry acknowledges, I do in part wish to examine the constitutive powers of governmentality, but I do not believe that these powers are constitutive all the way down. In the shape of capitalist social relations, they come up against some significantly different social phenomena that place significant limits on their constitutive powers.

Adopting a critical realist ontology that sees the social world as made up of stratified social relations, I argue that governmentality has a particular place within the social formation. To take the best known passage from Foucault (2007) as our guide, governmentality is an 'ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power' (108). Again emphasising specificity, Foucault (2007) describes a type of power called government 'which has led to the development of a series of specific

governmental apparatuses ... and knowledges' (108). And again he takes a specific focus on how the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth century and was then gradually governmentalised (2007: 109).

Of course it is possible to play games with different passages from Foucault in order to read him in such a way that fits with our own ontology. However, I think it is quite clear from these passages that Foucault is talking about something that exists in a particular form and particular space and that if I translate this into the language of critical realism, he is not talking about deeper social structures, nor even a deeper discursive realm or episteme, but a domain of institutions, tactics and procedures. Without wishing to push my own particular approach too strongly, I would say that the issue at stake is whether one wants to have a social ontology of different stratified layers, or whether one is happy with an ontology that is limited to institutions, procedures and tactics. My own reading of international politics is that it is difficult to say much about how institutions, procedures and tactics work in different ways in different places unless we have an underlying ontology that looks at conditions of possibility. It is not just about how governmentality constitutes, but how it is itself constituted. I read this as not as governmentality versus the social but governmentality as *emergent* from the social.

This is what leads me to focus on governmentality as liberal. Of course it can be much more than this, but as I do not see governmentality existing 'all the way down', the interesting issue is how it interacts with and is influenced by the dominant power relations within the international system. While governmentality may well take many forms, if the dominant states and international organisations are of a liberal nature, then this is bound to be reflected in the type of

governmentality that is promoted. This is not to deny that more organic forms of governmentality might emerge in different places, but in the international realm it reflects hierarchy and power politics. In

my initial review, I noted that Corry recognises hierarchy, but wishes to find an alternative model that takes us beyond this. My argument is that it is impossible to do this.

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## About the Authors

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